

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03
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FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3392
INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY MANAGTYA IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 0745

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, ES
SUBJECT: PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE CLARAMOUNT CALLS ON AMBASSADOR
SIX DAYS BEFORE ELECTION

REFS: (A) SAN SALVADOR 0499, (B) SAN SALVADOR 0013

1. OPPOSITION PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE COL. ERNESTO CLARAMOUNT, ACCOMPANIED BY A NON-PARTICIPATING ATTORNEY ULISES FLORES, CALLED ON THE AMBASSOR AON FEBRUARY 14. COL CLARAMOUNT PRESENT A WRITTEN MEMORANDUM, ESSENTAILLY A COMPENDIUM OF HIS PARTY'S CHARGES AGAINST THE MOLINA GOVERNMENT FOR ITS MALFEASANCE IN OFFICE AND USE OF FRAUDULENT MEANS TO RIG THE FEBRUARY 20 ELECTION. CLARAMOUNT REFERRED, IN PASSING, TO SIMILAR PROTESTATION BEING MADE IN WASHINGTON BY NAPOLEON DUARTE TO VICE PRESIDENT MONDALE, SENATOR KENNEY, CONGRESSMAN KOCH, AND TO THE DEPARTMENT. CLARAMOUNT SAID THE TWO EFFORTS, HIS AND DUARTES, WERE UNCOORDINATED AND HIS MEMORANDUM IS NOT THE SAME AS ANY MATERIAL DUARTE MIGHT HAVE DELIVERED.

2. ASKED BY THE AMBASSADOR FOR HIS EXPECTATIONS OF WHAT MIGHT
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HAPPEN IN THE ELECTION, CLARAMOUNT SAID HE GREATLY FEARS THE POTENTIAL FOR VIOLENCE. IN HIS OPINION, HE EXPLAINED, THE OVERWHLEMING MAJORITY OF THE VOTERS ARE WITH HIM. HE ALSO CLAIMED THAT HE HAS PROMISES FROM THE SECURITY SERVICE CHIEFS, AND MILITARY OFFICERS, TO RESPECT THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE. HE NEVERTHELESS BELIEVES THE REGIME HAS DEMONSTRATED A WILLINGNESS TO CHEAT, AND THREATEN, TO ACHIEVE THE APPEARANCE

OF A ROMERO VICTORY. CLARAMOUNT SAID HE FEARS THAT THE POPULACE, AGAIN BLATANTLY DEPRIVED OF ITS CHOICE OF LEADERSHIP, COULD GET OUT OF HAND AND TRY TO IMPOSE ITS WILL BY VIOLENCE. THE COLONEL SAID THAT, ALTHOUGH HE IS UNEQUIVOCALLY AGAINST THE USE OF FORCE, AND WILL USE ALL HIS POWERS TO AVOID SUCH A TURN OF EVENTS, HE IS NOT THE TYPE OF LEADER WHO COULD LET HIS FOLLOWERS, ONCE ON THE MARCH, FACE THE ENEMY WITHOUT HIM IN THE LEAD. HE ENDED BY SAYING THAT THIS FEAR WAS ONE MOTIVE FOR HIS VISIT. HE WANTED THE USG TO UNDERSTAND THAT HE WAS NOT A MAN OF VIOLENCE, AND THAT IF CIRCUMSTANCES MADE HIM DO SO LATER IT WAS BECAUSE THE PRESENT REGIME, CIRCUMSTANCES, AND HIS PERSONALITY, HAD FORCED HIM TO JOIN A POPULACE OUTRAGED BY THE ACTS OF ANY UNHEEDING GOVERNMENT.

3. THE AMBASSADOR EXPRESSED THE USG'S DISINTEREST IN WHICH OF THE TWO CANDIDATES WINS THE ELECTION, ITS COMMITMENT TO A FREE AND DEMOCRATIC ELECTION, AND HIS HOPE THAT NEITHER SIDE WILL RESORT TO VIOLENCE, WHATEVER THE OUTCOME.

4. COMMENT. THE EMBASSY FEELS THAT CLARAMOUNT IS INCORRECT IN TWO OF HIS THREE ASSESSMENTS OF WHAT IS OCCURRING, OR MIGHT OCCUR. FIRST, WE BELIEVE HE IS OVERESTIMATING HIS ATTRACTION TO THE VOTERS. PREVIOUS REPORTING (REFTELS) HAS RECOUNTED THE LIFELESSNESS OF HIS CAMPAIGN TO DATE, AND THIS DESCRIPTION REMAINS ACCURATE. WHILE THERE IS LITTLE QUESTION THAT ROMERO IS NOT PARTICULARLY POPULAR EITHER, HE DOES HAVE SEVERAL STRONG BLOCS BEHIND HIM - ANEP AND THE MAJORITY OF THE ARMY OFFICER CORPS. WHILE THIS SUPPORT IS PROBABLY SHALLOW, AND

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POSSIBLY SHAKY IN PARTS, IT IS MORE THAN CLARAMOUNT HAS. MANY OF THE COMPLAINTS VOICE AGAINST ROMERO - HIS MILITARY BACKGROUND, HIS LIMITED KNOWLEDGE OF THE COMPLEXITIES OF GOVERNMENT, HIS POTENTIAL TO RESORT TO EXTRA-LEGAL MEANS TO MAINTAIN CONTROL, FAMILY PROBLEMS - ALSO APPLY TO CLARAMOUNT. THOSE WHO VOTE FOR THE LATTER, AND THAT MIGHT OR MIGHT NOT BE A MAJORITY, ARE CASTING BALLOTS AGAINST ROMERO AND THE PRESENT PCN REGIME RATHER THAN FOR CLARAMOUNT. SECOND, THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THE COLONEL IS OVERESTIMATING THE PROBABILITY THAT HIS FOLLOWERS WILL TURN TO THE STREETS AND VIOLENCE AFTER ROMERO WINS. IT IS DIFFICULT TO FORESEE WHAT WOULD SET THEM OFF, WHAT WOULD BE THE "SMOKING PISTOL" IN A NATIONAL REFERENDUM WHERE VOTES ARE CAST, COUNTED AND ANNOUNCED OVER A PERIOD OF DAYS, IN SEEMING CONFORMITY WITH CONSTITUTIONAL MEANS. VERY FEW PERSONS, AND THEY ARE ALL MEMBERS OF THE REGIME, WILL KNOW HOW THE VOTE COUNT ACTUALLY GOES. EVEN THESE WILL HAVE ONLY AN APPROXIMATE IDEA, SINCE THE MECHANISMS OF MANIPULATION (WHO VOTES, HOW MANY TIMES, AND FOR WHOM) WILL ALREADY HAVE DISTORTED THE REFERENDUM.

5. THIS LEADS TO WHERE CLARAMOUNT IS ACCURATE IN HIS ANALYSIS, THE GOVERNMENT'S WILLINGNESS TO RESORT TO FRAUD TO ASSURE ROMERO'S VICTORY. THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT ALL LEVERS THE GOVERNMENT HAS ARE BEING UTILIZED TO THEIR FULLEST. ONE OF THE FEW EFFECTIVE TV SPOTS THE UNO WAS ABLE TO ASSEMBLE WITH ITS MEAGER CAMPAIGN FUNDS APPEARED ONCE AND THEN DISAPPEARED FROM THE AIRWAVES. ALL OPPOSITION SUGGESTIONS TO THE CENTRAL ELECTION COMMITTEE (CCE) ON HOW THE ELECTORAL PROCESS MIGHT BE LESS SUBJECT TO FRAUD, I.E., INDELIBLE INK ON THUMBS OF THOSE WHO VOTE, ETC., HAVE BEEN REJECTED. EVERYONE HERE, INCLUDING CLARAMOUNT AND HIS ADVISORS, ASSUMES THAT ROMERO WILL BE ANNOUNCED WINNER NO MATTER WHAT ACTUALLY TAKES PLACE SUNDAY.
LOZANO

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